

The IDVA Update

New Deputy Director Jim Holdeman



Jim Holdeman has been named Deputy Director of the Indiana Department of Veterans Affairs and assumed those responsibilities on October 28, 2002. Jim, originally from Elkhart, IN, served in the United States Army as a linguistics specialist for the Army Security Agency from 1968 through 1971. His primary duty station was Kagnev Station, Asmara, Ethiopia (now in

Eritrea). Jim left the army as an E-5 and returned to Indiana.

He served several years as an Air Traffic Controller working in Chicago, then at Wright Patterson Air Force Base, and finally in Indianapolis.

In 1987 Jim went to work for the State of Indiana in the Department of Correction as a correctional officer, then as the Central Office Computer Network Administrator, and finally as the Supervisor of Records.

Jim and his wife, Jennifer, live in the Danville area and have 5 children - three of whom are on there own now with two still home.

Many of you saw Jim at the Fall Conference, and the rest will meet him at the Annual Conference next spring.



AMVETS Dedicates Carillon at IVMC

On Saturday, October 26, 2002, the AMVETS Service Foundation held a Dedication Ceremony adding a carillon to the grounds of the Indiana Veterans Memorial

Cemetery. The beautiful carillon serves as both a memorial for all those who served their country, and to those at rest in the cemetery.



William D. Jackson, Director of the Indiana Department of Veterans Affairs, served as Master of Ceremonies, and received the carillon from AMVETS President, Dale Hunnicutt, on behalf of the cemetery.

The Indiana Department of Veterans Affairs is most grateful to the AMVETS for this wonderful addition to the Indiana Veterans Memorial Cemetery.

Pro Bono Legal Aid for Veterans Going to the Veterans' Court of Appeals

VA Press Release

Vet Consortium Pro Bono Program: The Veterans Consortium is an organization established to provide free attorneys for unrepresented veterans who have an appeal

pending before the U.S. Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims and who are not otherwise able to obtain counsel to assist them. This is a co-operative effort by four veterans' service organizations - the American Legion, the Disabled American Veterans, the National Veterans Legal Services Program and the Paralyzed Veterans of America. The Consortium recruits and trains volunteer attorneys to help needy appellants with their appeals at the Court. If a veteran has filed an appeal with the Court and has not been able to obtain his or her own attorney within 30 days, he or she can then request assistance from the Pro Bono Program.

Contact Veteran Issues vetsprobono@rcn.com directly or check out www.vetsprobono.com if you need assistance at the U.S. Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims. You can also write Ronald B. Abrams, Esq., Director, Outreach & Education Components, 601 Indiana Avenue, N.W., Suite 1010, Washington D.C. 20004-2935; Tel: [202] 628-8164/8169 or Fax [888] 838-7727.



David Gray Joins IDVA Staff as SAA Specialist

The State Approving Agency of the Indiana Department of Veterans Affairs is pleased to

announce that David Gray, a retired United States Air Force Master Sergeant, has accepted the new position as a specialist to approve training programs leading to licensing and certification examination for veterans returning to civilian life.

David spent 20 years in the Air Force as a supply systems analyst. He is married, and he and his

wife, Mary, have 5 children, ranging in age from 14 years to 3 years. Dave is originally from Richmond, Indiana.

New Program Helps Vets with Franchises

VA Press Release

WASHINGTON (Nov. 20, 2002) - Owning a franchise operation is now more affordable for veterans, thanks to a program recently announced by Secretary of Veterans Affairs Anthony J. Principi.

The Veterans Transition Franchise Initiative, commonly known as "VetFran", allows veterans to acquire a franchise with a down payment of 10 percent or less of the initial franchise cost, which generally ranges from \$45,000 to \$150,000 for a small business. Franchising companies absorb the difference.

"Veterans are self-starters who possess an excellent work ethic. They are leaders who know how to manage others," Principi said. "The VetFran program provides veterans who want to be in business for themselves a wonderful opportunity to get their feet in the door."

Dr. Leo S. Mackay Jr., VA's Deputy Secretary, was the featured speaker at a Sept. 24 meeting of the International Franchise Association (IFA), VetFran's sponsor, to launch the new initiative.

Mackay also attended the annual convention in Orlando, FL, earlier this year where the two organizations signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) that they will work to promote franchise opportunities for veterans. IFA's then-Chairman Jim Amos, President/CEO of Mail Boxes Etc, Inc., joined him in signing the MOU.

"I am convinced that the partnership we are embarking on is a win-win collaboration. It represents confidence in our nation's veterans, benefits to our economy, and an investment in the future of America" said Mackay.

IFA first introduced VetFran in the early 1990s as a way for franchisers to express gratitude to military members for their service during the Gulf War. In the last several years, the program had all but been forgotten. The current war against terrorism has rekindled interest in extending franchise opportunities to military veterans.

A Hawaii veteran recently became the first to acquire a franchise under the revitalized VetFran program, obtaining a franchise for Expectec Technology Services, a technology supplier headquartered in Garden Grove, CA. He paid \$40,000 instead of the \$60,000 he would have paid without VetFran.

Currently, VetFran is limited to franchises with initial investments up to \$150,000, the maximum loan amount on which the SBA offers 85 percent loan guarantees. So far, nearly 75 franchisers are participating. VetFran may expand later to include franchises costing over \$150,000, for which the SBA offers 75 percent loan guarantees. Additional information is available on VA's Web page at <<http://www.vetbiz.gov/>>.

"When they one day put aside their uniforms, today's servicemen and women must know that they will have real means and opportunities to pursue a career and make a living for themselves and their families," said Mackay. "This initiative helps provide that."

Severely Disabled Veterans Get Health Care Priority from VA

VA Press Release

WASHINGTON – The Department of Veterans Affairs is establishing priority access to health care for severely disabled veterans under new regulations recently announced.

"It is unacceptable to keep veterans with service-connected medical problems waiting for care," said Secretary of Veterans Affairs Anthony J. Principi. "These veterans are the very reason we exist, and everything we do should focus first on their needs."

The new regulation is being implemented in two phases. Under the first phase, which is being implemented immediately, VA will provide priority access to health care for veterans with service-connected disabilities rated 50 percent or greater. This new priority includes hospitalization and outpatient care for both service-connected and non-service-connected treatment. VA will continue to treat immediately any veteran needing emergency care.

In the second phase, which will be implemented next year, VA will provide priority access to other service-connected veterans for their service-connected conditions.

The number of veterans using VA's health care system has risen dramatically in recent years, increasing from 2.9 million in 1995 to a projected 4.4 million in 2002. An additional 600,000 veterans are projected to enroll in VA health care in 2003. Unable to absorb this increase, VA has more than 280,000 veterans on waiting lists to receive medical care.

Although VA operates more than 1,300 sites of care, including 163 hospitals and more than 800 outpatient clinics, the increase in veterans seeking care outstrips VA's capacity to treat them.

"VA provides the finest health care in the country, but if a veteran cannot see a doctor in a timely manner, then we have failed that veteran," said Principi. "I will work to honor our commitment to veterans," he added. "But when it comes to non-emergency health care, we must give the priority to veterans with severe service-connected disabilities."

Concurrent Receipt

President Bush signed the FY 2003 National Defense Authorization Act into Law on December 2, 2002. The Act includes "Special Compensation" for certain 20 year or over retirees with combat related disabilities.

There are two rules that lead to the "special compensation" under the new law.

First, any retiree with a 10% or greater service connected disability that is associated with the award of the Purple Heart will be eligible for the program. Under this rule the "special compensation" will be applied only to that portion of the offset that is directly related to the Purple Heart.

The second group of individuals eligible for the "special compensation" are those retirees rated 60% or higher with injuries or illnesses attributable to combat situations, combat oriented training, hazardous duty, or instrumentalities of war. These categories were taken from DOD instruction 1332.38, and determination as to who will qualify will be in the hands of the DOD. Their categories are:

Direct result of armed conflict: War, expedition, occupation of an area or territory, battle, skirmish, raid, invasion, rebellion, insurrection, guerrilla action, riot, or any other action in which service members are engaged with a hostile or belligerent nation, faction, force, or terrorist.

While engaged in hazardous service: including, but not limited to, aerial flight duty, parachute duty, demolition duty, experimental stress duty, and diving duty.

Under conditions simulating war: resulting from military training, such as war games, practice alerts, tactical exercises, airborne operations, leadership reaction courses, grenade and live fire weapons practice, bayonet training, hand to hand combat training, rappelling, and negotiation of combat confidence and obstacle courses (not including PT).

Caused by an instrumentality of war: (not necessarily during a war) includes wounds caused by a military weapon, accidents involving a combat vehicle, injury or sickness caused by fumes, gases, or explosion of military ordinance, vehicles or materials.

Those affected by the new law should see differences beginning in January 2003.

Online System Speeds Up Veterans' Home Loan Processing

VA Press Release

WASHINGTON – A new federal Internet-based system for mortgage bankers and other lenders will speed up the processing of home loans for veterans through the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA).

After the veteran's information is entered by the financial institution providing the loan, the lender will receive a certificate authenticating the veteran's eligibility in seconds. Previously, when a certificate of eligibility was needed, a form was submitted to VA and the certificate was mailed, a process that can take a week or more.

"This leap forward in VA automation is great news for the veteran anxious to close a loan and move into a new home," said VA Under Secretary for Benefits Daniel L. Cooper. "When interest rates begin to change, getting loan procedures resolved quickly can be important to our veterans."

The new system, called Automated Certificate of Eligibility (ACE), should be especially beneficial for active-duty members and veterans who are using their home loan benefit for the first time.

Last year VA guaranteed more than 250,000 loans valued at \$31.2 billion. Approximately 80 percent of these loans require a certificate of eligibility. VA anticipates the ACE system will be able to generate a certificate for 30 to 50 percent of these loans. However, some loans will still require manual processing by VA, including veterans whose eligibility is based on National Guard or Reserve service, those with irregular discharges, and those in several other situations.

Where the new electronic system is used, the eligibility certificate will be printed from the lender's computer and it will be customized, bearing the date and lender's name as well as a unique authorization number. For the veteran that represents a change from the traditional certificate process in which the veteran often kept a copy of the certificate of eligibility to take to a prospective lender.

The ACE system will not reject any veterans for home loans, and lenders will not be involved in

deciding any eligibility issues. A veteran whose eligibility involves special issues requiring the traditional staff review may still request a certificate of eligibility in advance of approaching a bank or mortgage company with a loan application by sending in VA Form 26-1880, Request for Determination of Eligibility for VA Home Loan Benefits.

All lenders participating in the VA loan guaranty program have access to the system. Veterans or service members interested in learning more about their VA home loan benefits or who wish to obtain forms may visit www.homeloans.va.gov on the Internet.



Rockefeller Criticizes New Veterans' Plan

Karin Fischer
Daily Mail Washington bureau

WASHINGTON -- Veterans with disabilities incurred during their military service will go to the head of the line for medical care under a new policy recently announced by the Department of Veterans Affairs.

But critics, including Senate Veterans Chairman Jay Rockefeller, and at least one veterans' group, say the policy could further delay care for the hundreds of thousands of former service members

already on waiting lists. And, they say, the policy ignores the larger problem - inadequate funding for health care services.

"In my view, the administration has a choice: either own up to the demand for health care services and provide funding - my preference - or manage enrollment," Rockefeller, D-W.VA., said on the Senate floor. "The administration has chosen a completely different course." Rockefeller said he was concerned the new rule could create a "serious hardship" for veterans with non-service connected disabilities who may have to wait longer for care.

There currently are 280,000 veterans on waiting lists for health care nationwide, spokeswoman Laurie Tranter said. She was unsure of the number who would qualify for priority care under the new rule. The veteran also must be at least 50 percent disabled.

In 1996 Congress passed legislation opening up the veterans' health care system to all former service members. A generous benefit package, particularly prescription drug coverage, attracted large numbers of veterans to enroll. Although the backlog is declining, the Department has taken a number of steps to try to reduce wait times, including streamlining clinic procedures and tracking patients on wait lists, Tranter said. The real answer to reducing the backlog is to adequately fund the health care system said Steve Thomas of the American Legion. While the American Legion doesn't oppose the new rule, Thomas' organization, along with the Veterans of Foreign Wars and the Disabled American Veterans, instead has advocated allowing Medicare, the health program for older Americans, to reimburse the agency and has supported making funding for veterans' health care mandatory rather than subject to annual discretionary spending decisions.

"We need to correct the core problem," said Joe Violante of the Disabled American Veterans.

The Paralyzed American Veterans have written to Rockefeller expressing concern about the potential repercussions of the new rule. "No one can argue that service-connected disabled veterans do not deserve the highest priority for veterans benefits and services," Executive Director Delatorro McNeil wrote. "However, by allowing admitting clerks to give them front-of-the-line access, the regulations inherently give these same clerks the authority to deny care to veterans in other categories when budgets remain tight."

Guidance sent from the department to veterans' medical centers across the country says new patients in the priority category should be seen within 30 days. Established patients should be contacted and can have their appointments moved ahead. The instructions, however, warn, "In no case should elective scheduling of any veteran adversely impact the medical care of any patient."

The public comment period remains open until Nov. 18, but the rule, implemented under special priority circumstances, went into effect immediately upon issuance.

Veterans History Project Keeps War Memories Alive

There are over 19 million veterans living in the U.S. today. With each is a personal story of battles fought, victories and defeats. Each story, though sometimes heartbreaking, is full of love, dedication and patriotism.

That's how Peter Bartis describes his work with the Veterans History Project. The grassroots

effort that began two years ago - and has now caught fire - is hoping to keep those memories alive.

Bartis, a senior program officer for the project, said that each day some 1,500 U.S. veterans die - and with them a treasured part of the nation's past. "These are some of the most amazing stories; when you put them all together you get a story of the nation," he said.

Over the past year alone, the project's staff of 16 has already collected more than 14,000 items such as letters and other memoirs, and video and audiotape interviews.

"We're all just blown away by these stories," he said. "The information has been very rich, it's been emotional, and it's very heartening to listen to the stories, to learn how and why they (veterans) joined, their war-time experience."

With the idea that future generations could learn from the histories of the nation's veterans, the American Folklife Center at the Library of Congress, began the effort to collect video and audio recordings of personal histories and testimonials of American war veterans - men, women, civilians who served in World Wars I and II, and the Korean, Vietnam and Persian Gulf wars. The center needs contributions of civilian volunteers, support staff, and war industry workers also.

Bartis said the amount of regular mail and the number of e-mails and phone calls vary from day to day, "but the response to this project has been enormous." "We get to know a lot of these people personally. That's the fun part," he said. Aside from the thousands of items received from everyday Americans each year, Bartis said the project has gained tremendous support from the corporate community as well.

The Veterans History Project's official Web site lists more than 50 national partners and support organizations from every state. The military services contribute through offices such as the Army's U.S. Center of Military History and the Naval and Marine Corps Historical Centers, as well as DOD's official committee commemorating the 50th Korean War anniversary. Major national veterans associations are well-represented also.

"This is not our project or the library's project. This is the nation's project," Bartis said. "We want people of all walks of life to feel ownership of this project." To learn more about the Veterans History Project, visit www.loc.gov/folklife/vets [<http://www.loc.gov/folklife/vets>].

Senator Lugar's Office Assisting with the Veterans History Project.

Senator Lugar's staff has set up a team statewide to assist veterans in getting their stories recorded and entered into the project.

Those who are ready to participate or those seeking further information are encouraged to contact the Senator's Indianapolis office at (317) 226-5555, or e-mail them at vetproj.lugar.senate.gov or write them at

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